



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Regional Agricultural Council

March 6, 2022

Senator Christine Cohen, Co-Chair
Representative Joseph P. Gresko, Co-Chair
Environment Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

RE: Bill No. 243, An Act Concerning Climate-Smart Agricultural Practices.

Dear Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Christine Cohen and Representative Joseph Gresko:

Thank you Co-Chairs Cohen and Gresko, and honorable members of the Environment Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony for this public hearing concerning Raised House Bill No.243, *An Act Concerning Climate-smart Agricultural Practices*.

The Regional Agricultural Council (RAC) which is part of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) is in full support of the proposed bill.

One main component of Climate-Smart Practices is healthy soil. Healthy soil is the foundation of productive, sustainable agriculture. Managing for soil health allows producers to work with the land – not against – to reduce erosion, maximize water infiltration, improve nutrient cycling, save money on inputs, and ultimately improve the resiliency of their working land.

To help improve working land in the RiverCOG region and to promote agriculture, the RiverCOG formed an Agriculture Council, the first Council of Governments to form a Regional Agriculture Council in Connecticut. The RAC was formed in 2013 having one representative from each of the 17 regional towns: Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland and Westbrook. The mission statement of the RAC is: The RiverCOG Regional Agriculture Council shall be an advisory board working in conjunction with the local Agriculture Commissions (if a town has an Agriculture commission in place) offering resources and helping with decision making. The duties and responsibilities are: Advocacy, Information, Education, Conflict Resolution, and Economic Opportunities.

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Focusing on the RAC's goals, the RAC applied for a grant and received it, from the Department of Agriculture (DoA). The grants goals are to increase acreage farmed in the RiverCOG region and to restore land health. The grant brings Municipalities, Land Trusts, Farmland Trust, and other land conservation organizations together to make available land that was once farmed or land that could potentially be farmed back into agriculture production. The whole premise is that No-till equipment will be purchased to use this innovative agronomic system that reduces carbon-based inputs including maintenance and fuels, restores ecology and has the ability to keep the physical characteristics of the land intact thus, climate-smart agricultural practices. Farms in the region are generally small and cannot afford to purchase this type of equipment on their own. The DoA grant provides an opportunity for farmers to practice this new method.

This new program through the RAC, can possibly be just a start of possible programs for CT farmers. Bill #243 would be the next step to help farmers and to continue to implement smart agriculture practices. Bill #243 provides opportunities for more farmers in Connecticut to learn about and practice new methods. We hope that RAC's program can be an example of what new innovative farm practices Connecticut can offer to its farmers.

The RAC fully supports proposed Bill # 243.

The Regional Agriculture Council thanks the Committee for its time and attention to this most significant issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Halfinger', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Halfinger
Chairman of RAC

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